

# Design - Ko wai au? (Who am I?)

## A design based on a significant letter of students' names, Primary / Secondary Level Art Activity

### OVERVIEW:

This resource involves learning about elements of Maori kowhaiwhai patterns to engender respect and appreciation for the unique art forms of Aotearoa. Students then apply what they know in a design based on a letter shape that has significance to them.

The design also includes patterns and symbols from students' multi-cultural and diverse backgrounds. The activity is suited to senior Primary or junior Secondary students but could be adapted for more advanced students



### ACHIEVEMENT OBJECTIVES:

#### New Zealand Curriculum – Visual Arts Level 4

The level of difficulty can be adapted – please refer to the New Zealand Curriculum for objectives at higher levels

#### Understanding the Visual Arts in Context

Investigate the purpose of kowhaiwhai patterns in the past and present. Identify the contexts in which they were or are made, viewed, and valued.

#### Practical knowledge:

Explore art-making conventions related to basic kowhaiwhai elements and symbolism. Apply knowledge of elements (line, shape) and principles (negative / positive, pattern) through the use of pen, paper and drawing.

#### Developing Ideas

Develop and revisit visual ideas about personal symbols and typography using the design process in response to ideas about their own identity supported by the study of typographic and kowhaiwhai artist's works.

#### Communicating about art

Explore and describe ways in which meanings can be communicated and interpreted in their own and others' work in different places/times.

### Links to other curriculum areas:

Social Sciences, Hauora, Nga Toi.

## Materials needed:

**Media /Tools:** pencils (planning), paper, glue-sticks, scissors, pens for final design (fine-liners, permanent markers, and white paint markers), Whiteout tape dispensers (optional), internet and printing/photocopying access.

The final design can be enhanced by using a glossy, less absorbent printing paper.

**Techniques/skills;** scissor skills, composition: arrangement of shape / tone / negative/positive space, **Understanding;** traditional kowhaiwhai elements, symbolism and the design process.

## Starter – Exploring the koru, elements of kowhaiwhai patterns



A koru is a coiled spiral motif traditionally found in Maori kowhaiwhai patterns. They are derived from spiral shapes in nature such as the unfurling of native fern fronds. They symbolise new growth, change and movement.

Look at an example of a pītau ('pe-toe' - fern bulb) and a range of drawn koru in artworks and images, comparing shapes and ideas.

By Karora - Own work, Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2912878>

**Show** students and early classical example of kowhaiwhai patterns on waka paddles or on a traditional whare/pataka.

**Ask** where students have seen koru in other contexts (logos, tattoos, contemporary then as a class or individually, find examples to gather in a presentation to look at as a group and discuss.

*How has the use/purpose and meaning of koru and kowhaiwhai changed over time?*

*What do these shapes represent in Aotearoa?*

## Kōwhaiwhai elements – what are they?

Get students to copy the basic kōwhaiwhai from the task sheet (see appendix) and make notes around them (student examples below)



## Kōwhaiwhai patterns then and now – inherited traditions

### **THEN: Where were kōwhaiwhai patterns found in a classical whare whakairo?**

For younger students this information could be provided and discussed in class, older students could use their research skills to locate information independently.

There are examples online but this is also a great opportunity to connect with your local marae and consult with kaumātua in your community.

#### **Key knowledge about Māori art:**

- kōwhaiwhai are one of many traditional Māori art forms including whakairo, tukutuku, raranga and moko.
- historical colours were based on available pigments (black – soot, red ochre – clay and white and sometimes blue)
- you can find kōwhaiwhai patterns on the heke (rafters) of wharenui and canoe paddles
- patterns and designs are often associated or especially designed and these designs should not be used/reproduced without seeking appropriate permission

#### **Key art-specific knowledge:**

- art elements (line, shape, tone) and selected principles (negative / positive)
- reflection, rotation and symmetry to create pattern (online maths related lessons are available for linking).

### **NOW: Look at some contemporary Māori artists that use the elements of kōwhaiwhai patterns (see examples below)**

- Cliff Whiting
- Buck Nin
- Darren George
- Shane Hansen
- Ngataiharuru Taepa -  
Manawarangi #1 Collection of Te Papa

#### **Discuss:**

- Can you identify any kōwhaiwhai elements that you have researched through drawing in these artists' images?
- How are the colours, shapes, materials and ideas similar to traditional kowhaiwhai patterns?
- What makes them different to traditional kowhaiwhai patterns?
- If you could travel back in time and show a traditional kowhaiwhai artist some of these contemporary artworks what do you think they would say?

### **Compare and contrast:**

**For older students** good discussion could be generated around whether contemporary artists should be changing the style of kōwhaiwhai.

The use of kowhaiwhai and other Maori art forms by Pakeha artists could be identified (e.g. Theo Schoon, Gordon Walters, and Otis Frizzell). How a range of people view this cultural appropriation could also be discussed.

## Art Activity:

Create a symbolic design about you/your whānau.

### Step 1 – Using negative shapes trial run

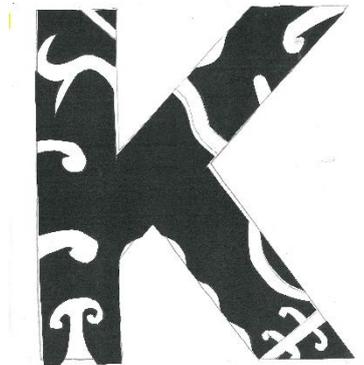
Give each student a copy of a sans serif block letterform on an A3 piece of paper



Bold [Block letters](#), Rounded Arial letters, Curly [Cursive letters](#)

Get students to LOOK at the letterform from all angles by turning it around. A good first step is to cut 2-3 negative spaces out of the letters with scissors to begin with.

Then start to remove some koru, kape and other shaped 'negative' elements from the main structure. Encourage students to cut completely through parts of the letter form if necessary.

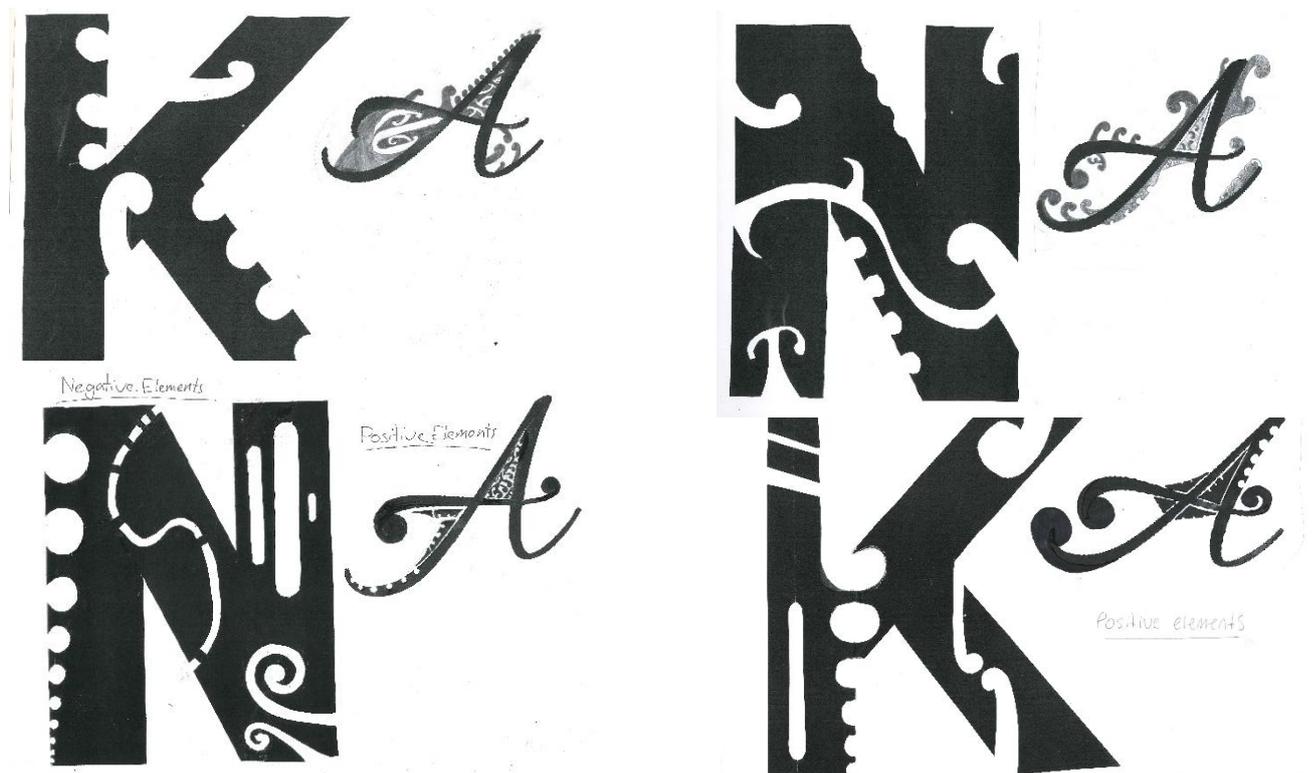


Student outcome: removing shapes from a letterform

### Step 2 – Using positive shapes trial run

Use a smaller copy of a cursive letterform on A5-A4 sized paper. These rounded cursive letters can easily have koru and kape elements added where they seem to 'fit' using a pencil or biro. Encourage students to brainstorm and think carefully as they look about where they could add or subtract from the letterforms using the curves and shapes they have researched so far.

Student outcomes from four students for both exercises:



## Prior Learning: towards final design

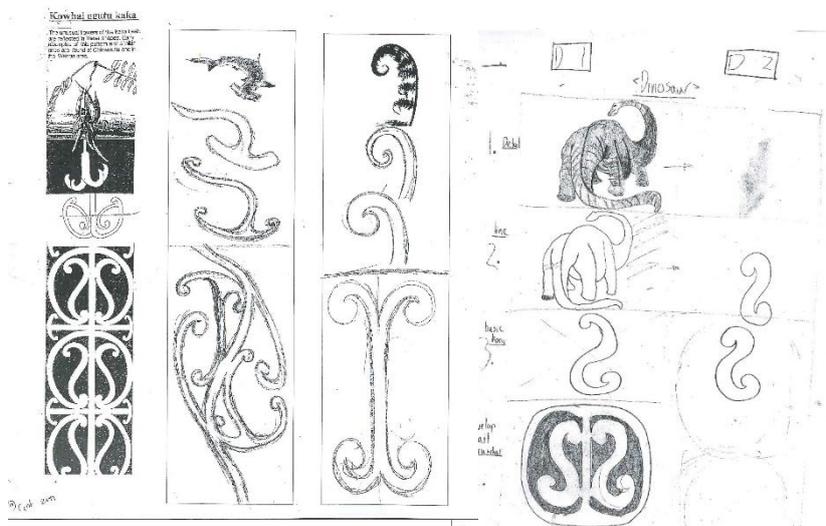
**Step 3 Brainstorm ideas** about self-identity in response to prompts given in class. How will the letterform represent you/your family by adding other shapes and symbols to the letter shape?

You may want to rule out commercial logos as a source of inspiration to encourage deeper thinking to elicit a range of shapes, symbols and patterns that represent students and their culture/interests.



- Found images could include native flora/fauna, landscapes, maps, letters or hand-written elements, documents, postcards, family photographs, flags, portraits of current family or ancestors, or students themselves.

*Exemplar brainstorm by teacher (right)*



**Step 4 Learn how to simplify and stylise shapes to create personalised symbols using Māori art elements.**

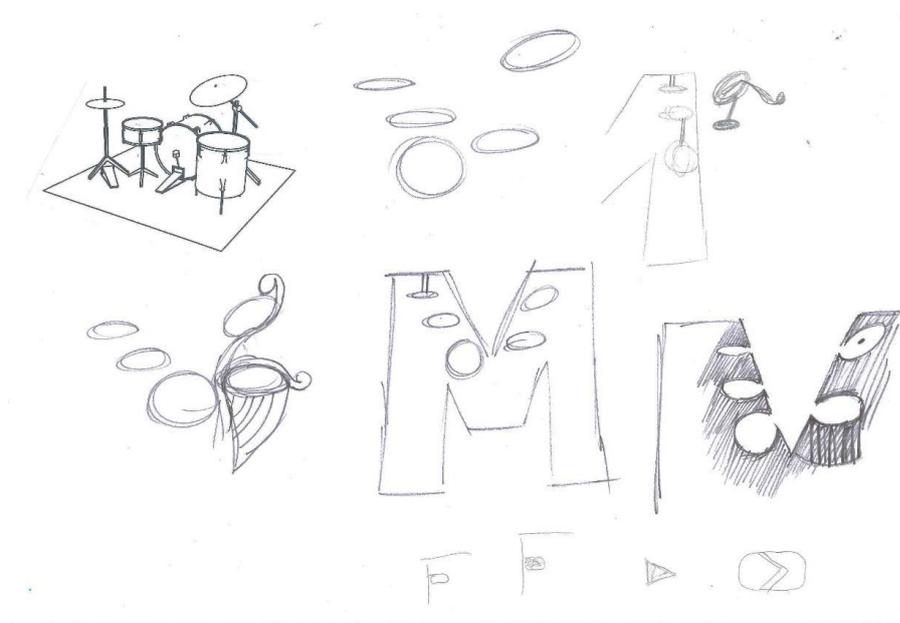
Look at how kowhaiwhai patterns arise from shapes in nature; get the students to start to combine the basic elements to represent shapes of natural objects that are important to them.

**Step 5 - Begin the final design by** choosing the type of lettering for a base shape. Bold block letters will encourage more use of negative space and cursive may prompt students who are more into adapting / in-filling through doodling. Older students could be given a choice.

Students should be encouraged to work through a number of developments to refine their ideas as they work.

- Look at examples of Shane Hansen and Michael Tuffery's typographic work where the patterns surround the letterforms as an option
- A second stage of online research will allow students to find shapes, patterns and symbols that relate to their own whakapapa, identity and/or interests.
- At this point students could sketch with pencils, work on top of multiple photocopies of their letters to stylise and adapt shapes (see overleaf)

*An exemplar where an everyday object (drum kit) is being simplified into a series of negative kape-like shapes*



### **Step 6 Transfer the final design onto quality A3 paper using a light-box or a window and fine-liners/permanent markers**

For this project, a paper with a light gloss finish from a standard stationary supplier worked out very well as it was economical with large areas of ink, did not bleed or run as ordinary photocopier paper would and was easier for the students to create smooth lines on.

#### **After this activity was completed:**

The final designs were scanned in on a photocopier and presented to the students as a slideshow during classes.

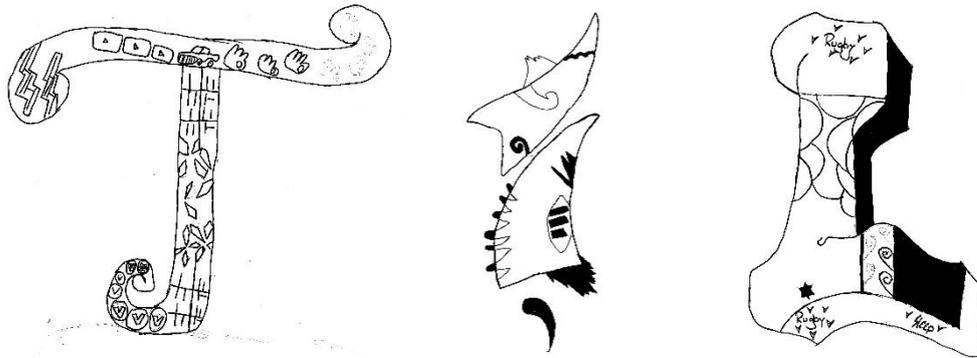
This was particularly effective as the increased contrast and change in scale allowed to the students to see their work in a similar context to the artworks and artists studied.

They then completed a TAG peer assessment of their work after which the work was assessed against the curriculum strands by students and a teacher.

## Examples of student outcomes:

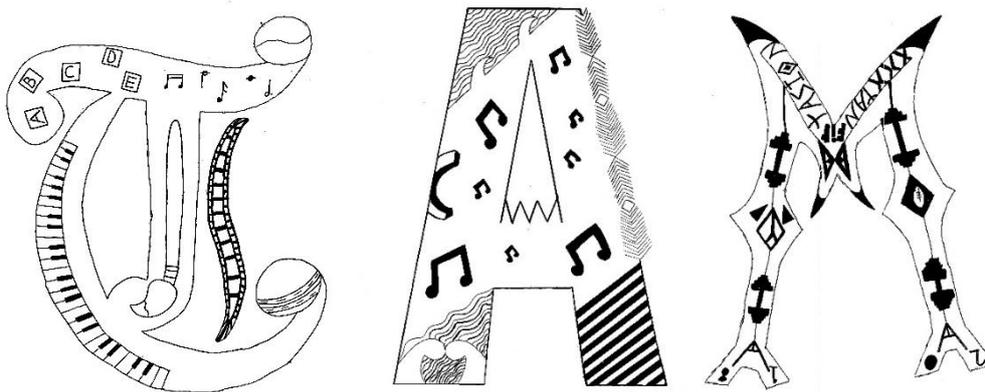
### Lower range – working towards the expected curriculum level (curriculum Level 3-4):

Typified by an inability to control media at the expected curriculum level (PK) and a very limited development of ideas (DI) either in relation to themselves OR positive/negative shapes in the work.



**Mid-range (lower) – working within the expected curriculum level** Practical knowledge is sufficient to produce a final typographic design with control at the expected level.

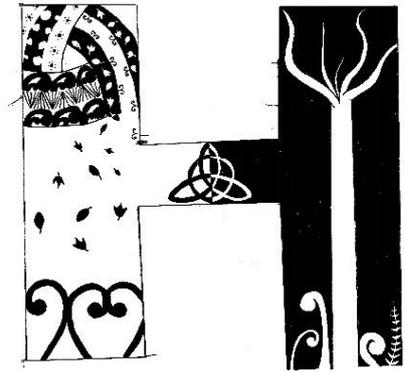
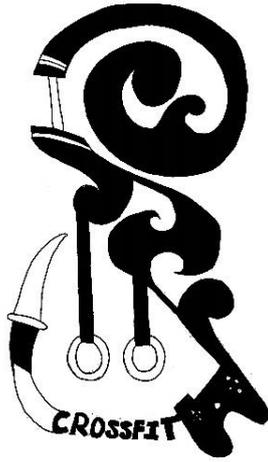
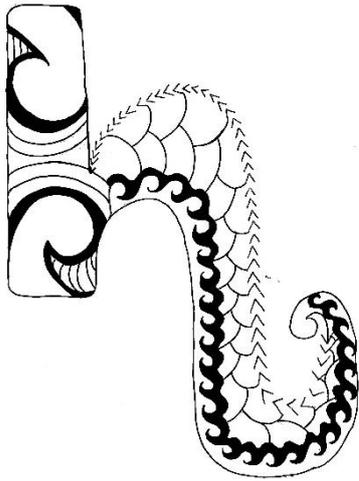
Understanding of symbolism and application of positive/negative elements is often inconsistent or lacking.



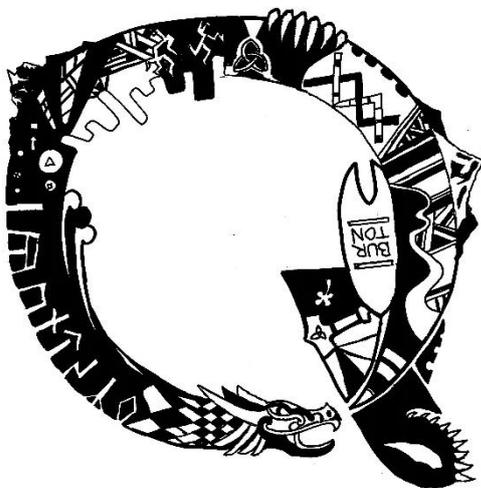
### Mid-range (upper) – working within the expected curriculum level

At the upper range of the curriculum level there is more evidence of understanding the graphic elements of tone, line, shape, negative and positive although the symbolism may be less well understood the rendering of the final design is assured.

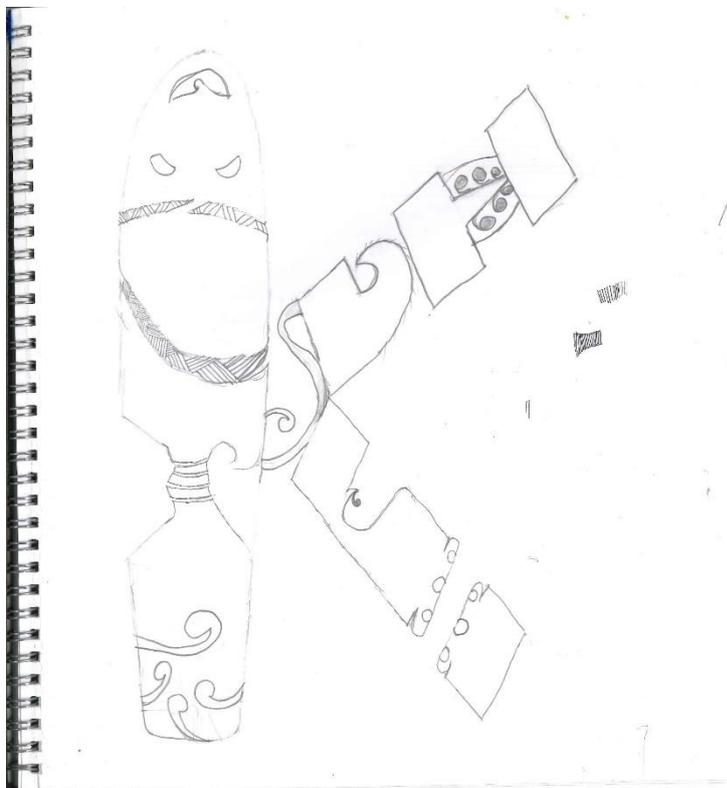




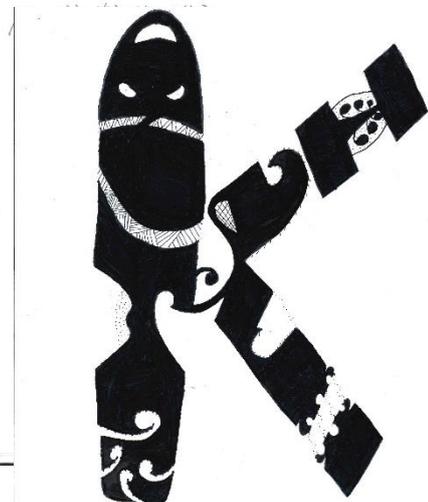
**Upper range - Performing above the expected level of practical design knowledge at Year 9**  
These designs show the ability to use positive/negative shapes within the letterforms, incorporate elements of Māori art forms and employ symbolic shapes relating to self.



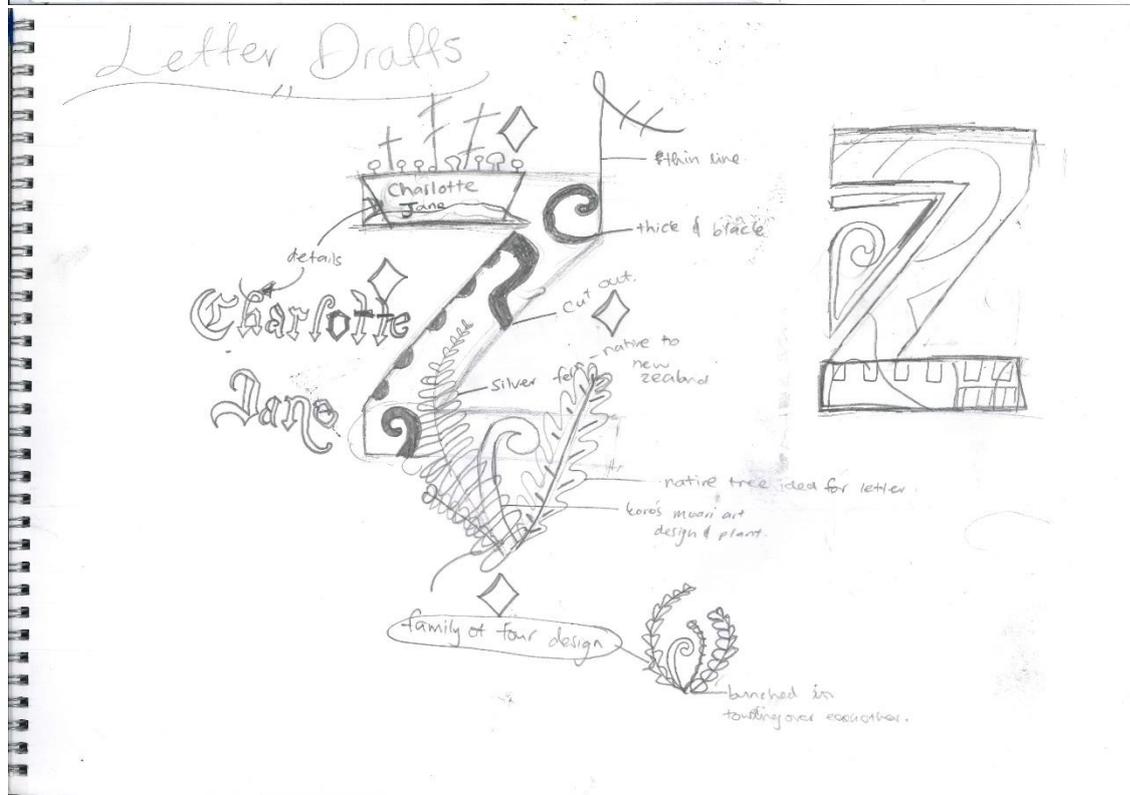
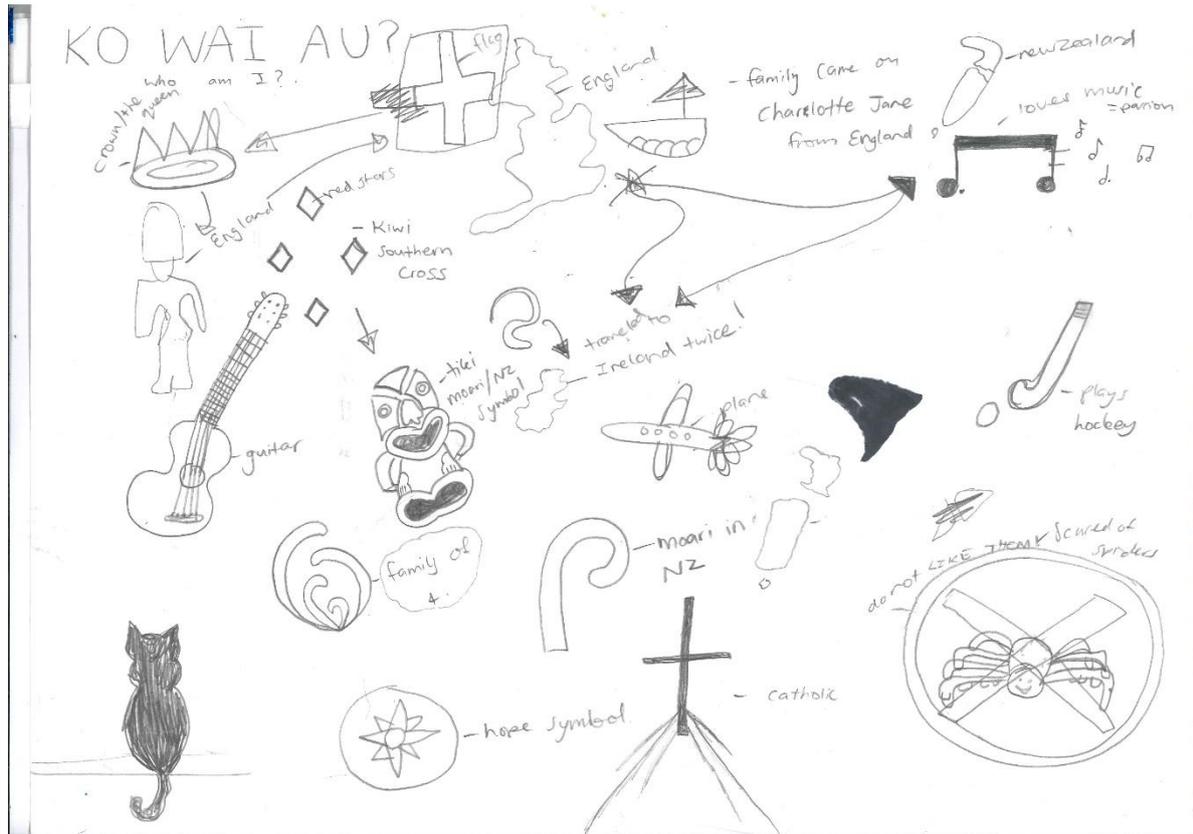
# Student workbook sample 1

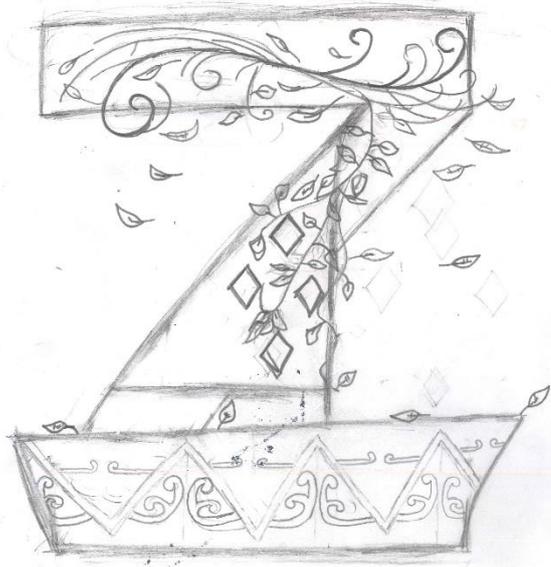


The clapper-board shape becomes pivotal to the design related to the letter 'K'



## Student workbook sample 2



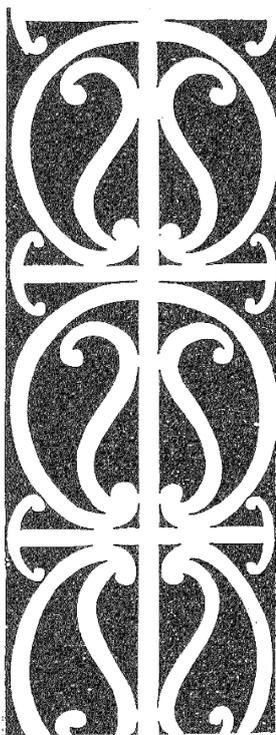


## Appendix of resources

Below you can see some examples of how kowhaiwhai patterns are inspired by natural forms.

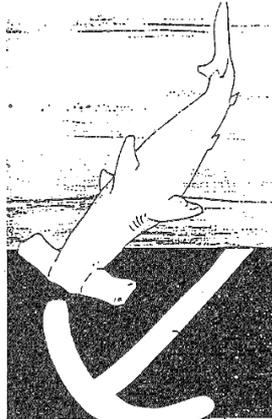
### Kowhai ngutu kaka

The unusual flowers of the kaka beak are reflected in these shapes. Early examples of this pattern and similar ones are found at Ohinemutu and in the Wairoa area.



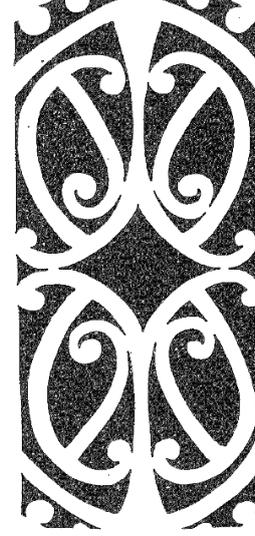
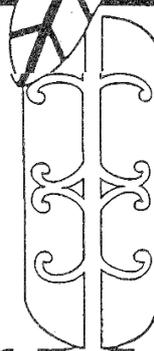
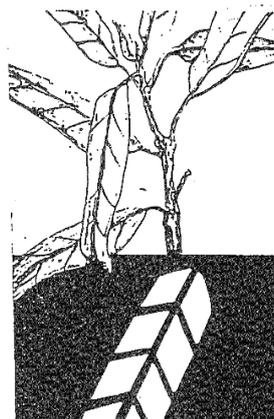
### Mango pare

The hammerhead shark found in the sea around New Zealand has given its name to this design.



### Rautawa

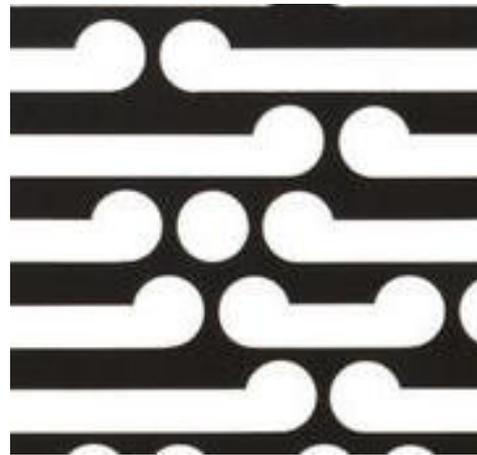
Rautawa is the name of the tawa leaf, which has a distinctive long narrow shape. This pattern is often used by Ngāti Porou.



## Artists using koru in different styles:

Close ups of images from traditional and contemporary artists for students to trace over to get a feel for the different shapes.

Kowhaiwhai detail from Te Papa collection dating from the 1800s



Detail of a work by Gordon Walters



Detail of works by Shane Hansen



Detail of a works by Ngatai Taepa

# Assessment schedule – Level 4 of the NZ Curriculum

Y9 – TYPOGRAPHIC DESIGN.

**NAME:**

## Practical Knowledge

WORKING TOWARDS L4	ACHIEVING WITHIN L4	EXCELLING ABOVE L4
1	2	3
		4
		5

**I can:**

Use **art/design elements - shape, line and tone** to create a letterform.

**I can:**

Create a letterform with **using the range of elements** with reference to classical Maori art elements.

**I can:**

Create a letterform with understanding of **positive / negative relationships using elements** with reference to classical Maori art elements.

Use **permanent marker** to create **line and fill for your design**.

Use permanent marker **with control** to create a clean-edged design with line and solid tone elements.

Use permanent marker **with facility** to create a range of line weights, clean edges and solid tone in your design.

## Developing Ideas.

WORKING TOWARDS L4	ACHIEVING WITHIN L4	EXCELLING ABOVE L4
1	2	3
		4
		5

**I can:**

**Generate my own letterform idea** to create a letterform design.

**I can:**

**Develop my own design ideas using the design process;** brainstorm, roughs, final to create a letterform design

**I can:**

**Refine a range of design ideas with understanding** through a brainstorm, series of thumbnails, roughs and final letterform design

**COMMENT:**

